

**Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Vision for Ministry Questionnaire**  
Research and Evaluation  
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*April 2008*

## **Overview**

The Northeastern Pennsylvania synod conducted a visioning exercise, and groups of people across the synod met to discuss current synodical priorities and their vision for the future. This report summarizes the responses of 54 participants who completed a brief questionnaire. All percentages were calculated using the total number of responses for each question.

## **Questionnaire Responses**

The first question asked participants to list the main issues facing the synod's congregations, and a total of 201 responses were given. The most common response was the decline in membership and attendance (21%), followed by stewardship and funding ministry (15%). Other common responses were youth and young adult interest and participation (10%), as well as lost vision and congregations being in "survival mode" (7%). Some participants felt the main issues facing congregations were evangelism (6%), the shortage of pastors, and the changes in demographics in the synod (both 5%). Others listed structural repairs and the lack of funds to fix them, the aging of members, congregations working together, activity in the community, and pastor-congregation communication (all 3%). The lack of volunteers (3%), detachment from decisions, and lack of understanding of what a Christian or Lutheran is (both 2%) were also listed. Other issues included vibrant worship, a 21<sup>st</sup> century/relevant church, and Bible literacy (all 2%). A couple participants listed lack of publicity of things they do well, conflict, and how concerned the synod is about helping congregations (all 1%) as main issues facing the synod's congregations.

The second question asked participants what excites them about the church, ministry, and the synod. A total of 154 responses were listed to this question. The most common area listed was youth ministry (12%), followed by the variety of worship and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, and the work of World Hunger and Lutheran World Relief (LWR) (both 9%). Other participants were excited about social and outward ministry as well as theology and Bible study (both 8%). Some participants listed strong leadership (7%), sharing ministry initiatives, and the Lutherans in Faith Together (LIFT) event (both 5%). Growing congregations in some areas, increased visibility of the synod, and sister synods were also listed as exciting areas (all 4%). Other areas listed were people seeking ministry as a vocation, relating the Gospel to everyday life, adult education, and new young families (all 3%). A couple participants were excited about rural ministry (2%), Bishop Hanson's theme at the adult Bible study, endowments, Bear Creek camp, technology/communication, and leadership training (all 1%).

In contrast, the next question asked participants what saddens them about the church, ministry, and the synod. A total of 151 responses were listed to this question. The most common response was division and conflict (14%), followed by declining membership and worship attendance (9%). Many participants were saddened by lack of funding and a small budget (8%), politics and power struggles (7%), congregation-synod disconnect, and losing young people (both 6%). Other areas listed were reluctance to change, worrying more about the building than the people, and disheartened pastors and lay leaders or burn-out (all 5%). Some participants mentioned narrow vision and too much money "saved away" in endowments (both 4%). Too business-focused, lack of pastoral care from the synod, and lack of the authority of Scripture were also listed (all 3%). Other participants listed too many small

congregations (3%), the bishop putting out fires and not having enough time for ministry, poor direction for the call process, and clergy dependence (all 2%). A couple participants were saddened by the lack of encouragement for lay people to become ordained, the lack of communication from the synod to congregations, the lack of evangelism, and the secularization of society and materialism (all 1%).

The last two questions of the survey focused on the future of the synod. First, participants were asked to list the three most important priorities for the synod over the next six years. A total of 153 responses were given. The top priority was evangelism and outreach (15%), followed by youth involvement (11%). Another priority mentioned by many participants was communication (8%), as well as the synod being more visible and more involved in the congregations (7%). Other participants listed the restructuring of congregations (7%), developing and supporting leadership, and emphasis on mission (both 6%) as important priorities. Some participants felt unity in the synod and a deeper understanding of Scripture and prayer (both 5%) were top priorities for the next six years. Reducing operating costs, stewardship and giving, and growth and change were also listed as important (all 3%). Some participants mentioned the sexuality study repercussions, advocacy and social issues (both 3%), the call process, and education about the synod and ELCA (both 2%) as important priorities. A couple participants listed as priorities being proactive in conflict situations, providing more information on grants, taking a position on issues like sexuality and immigration, inclusivity, more workshops, education, and a forum for congregations to share ideas and resources (all 1%).

The final question asked participants to list three attributes needed in the synod's next bishop. A total of 184 responses were given. The top attributes were pastoral and courageous vision (10%), followed by openness and willing to listen (9%). Leadership was one of the most common responses (7%), as well as a sense of humor/humility, spiritual/faithful, and a good communicator (all 5%). Many participants felt the bishop should have passion and be approachable and accessible (both 4%). Others felt the bishop should be more visible to the congregations, delegate work to staff, and be an extrovert (all 4%). Some participants listed "broad shoulders," the skills to handle hot issues and conflict, sharing the Gospel, and motivating members (3%) as important attributes. Intelligence/wisdom and integrity were also important traits (both 3%). A couple participants listed insight, commitment to community outreach and development, decisive and diplomatic, and dedicated (all 1%) as important attributes for the next bishop.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

As the Northeastern Pennsylvania synod looks forward to the next six years and a new bishop, there are many areas of strength as well as many areas for improvement. Most respondents to the questionnaire agreed that the main issues facing the synod's congregations are decline in membership and worship attendance, stewardship and funding ministry, and youth and young adult participation. Participants were most excited about youth ministry, variety in worship and *ELW*, the work of World Hunger and *LWR*, and outward and social ministry. On the other hand, participants were most saddened by division and conflict, declining membership and worship attendance, and the lack of funds and low budgets. Looking toward the future, the top priorities for the synod over the next six years were evangelism and outreach, youth involvement, and communication. Participants would like a bishop who is pastoral, has a courageous vision, is open and willing to listen, and shows strong leadership. Although the Northeastern Pennsylvania synod faces some challenges, focusing on these areas and priorities in the future will help give them a common vision for ministry in the next six years.